

**Abstract 434**

**TITLE:** We Are Everywhere! But How Do You Access Us?

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**ISSUE:** Latino men who have sex with other men and who don't identify as gay (LMSM) represent 80% of all the AIDS cases among Latinos in Santa Clara County, California. Latinos represent almost 24% of 2300 AIDS cases in this community. Reaching this population has been extremely difficult for those who have tried, unfortunately to no avail. There is little documentation on this elusive population. Sexual identity was never an issue for this program, but rather unsafe sexual behavior. Defining a culturally and linguistically appropriate intervention to decrease the spread of HIV among this population was paramount.

**SETTING:** Four venues were selected that were identified by our trained peer networkers. Four straight-identified Latino bars were found as sites for the community-level intervention. LMSM were the intended audience for the intervention. The setting was urban.

**PROJECT:** With a CDC grant (Project 704), formative research was conducted on LMSM to determine their HIV prevention needs and how to better intervene and meet those needs. The data suggested that LMSM were in the precontemplative stage of behavior change regarding condom usage. Our goal was to elevate that stage of behavior change among this population. A community-level intervention approach with Latino transgenders as principal networkers and educators was utilized. The innovativeness of using Latino transgenders with LMSM to deliver HIV prevention messages in their song and dance routines in straight-identified Latino bars was new and creative. Some of the intense training offered to the peer networkers ranged from HIV/AIDS, STDs to resource classes (a total of 10 weeks).

**RESULTS:** Initially, the bars and members of the target population were incredibly resistive to our attempts to provide HIV prevention education. Patience, tenacity and one-on-one conversations with bar owners and lead Latino transgenders finally allowed the intervention to proceed. Nine months ago, safer sex materials were literally thrown back at the peer networkers. However, with bar owners' cooperation, and slick and clever messages in song and dance routines, the reception has been quite different. Twelve peer networkers have been trained and have saturated these venues with messages of safer sex, responsibility and emphasizing good judgement. The use of condoms has been highlighted throughout. Latino men are now taking safer sex materials without much reservation. A social norm is beginning to occur at these venues. HIV prevention materials can be found throughout the bars before and after the interventions. The local Spanish speaking TV station has reported on the community-level intervention twice. LMSM are now taking condoms where before they rejected the notion. Tenacity, creativity and good peer networkers have proven to be an effective mode of changing behavior.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** One of the first lessons was not really knowing your community. Even though all staff were Latino, we were unaware of the incredible secrecy in the LMSM community.

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